

The Love Story of Hosea

(source unknown) (A first person narrative dramatic reading, yet true to the content of Hosea) (Slightly revised by James D. Price)

I have been called the prophet of the broken heart, but I would rather be remembered as the prophet of love and hope. I am Hosea, prophet of God to Israel, my homeland.

Come with me to my home on the outskirts of Samaria. There beneath the oak tree is Gomer, my wife. I love her as I love my own life. You will love her too. Sitting beside her is our son, Jezreel. He is eighteen now, handsome and strong--a young man with a heart for God. At Gomer's feet and looking up at her is Ruhamah, our daughter. Do you see how her hair glistens? She is the image of her mother. She was sixteen just half a year ago. And then here is Ammi, her brother-- fifteen and as warm and bubbling as the flowing brook that you hear in the background.

We are happy and at peace. It has not always been so.

I began my ministry as a prophet almost thirty years ago during the reign of Jeroboam II. Those were years of prosperity. The caravans that passed between Assyria and Egypt paid taxes into Jeroboam's treasury and sold their goods in our midst. But they also left their sons and daughters and their gods. These gods and the gods of the ancient Canaanites and of Jezebel have wooed the hearts of my people. Altars built for sin offerings have become places for sinning.

If you were to walk through my land today, you would see images and altars in all the green groves. My people have many sheep and cattle. Some think that Baal, the so-called fertility god, is the giver of lambs, of calves, and the fruit of the field. Every city has its high place where Baal is worshipped. There is a high place not far from here--you never are far from a high place in Israel in these days! Sometimes at night we hear the beat of the priest's music and the laughter of the sacred prostitutes. Last week a man and woman who live three houses from us sacrificed their infant son to Baal.

You may wonder how Jehovah's people could sink to such unholy ways. It is because the priests of God have departed from Him. They delight in the sins of the people; they lap it up and lick their lips for more. And thus it is "Like priest, like people." Because the priests are wicked, the people are too. Surely God will judge. My beautiful land is just a few short years from being crushed under the iron heel of the Assyrian military might.

Yes, thirty years ago God appointed me a prophet in Israel. My father, Berri, and my honored mother taught me early to fear Jehovah, the One true God of Israel. They taught me to hate the calf deity of the first Jeroboam. Daily we prayed. Daily we sang the songs of David and hungered for the coming Messiah.

My ministry has always been hard. The first ten years were the hot-blooded days of my twenties. My sermons were sermons of fire. My heart bled for my people. I was little heeded and generally scorned. When I was thirty-two, God stirred me and I spent many days in prayer and meditation. I felt lonely and in need of a companion.

The first frost of fall had tinted the leaves when I went with my parents to visit the home of Diblaim. In the busy activity of my ministry I had not seen the family for several years. We were engaged in lively conversation when through the door swept a young woman, Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. I remembered her as a pretty and somewhat spoiled child. But now she was a hauntingly beautiful woman. Her ivory face was framed in a wreath of raven black hair. I found myself fascinated by her striking beauty and had great difficulty in turning my eyes from her.

As we returned to our home that day, my father and I talked of many things. Yet, in my mind hung the image of a raven-haired Israelitess. My father's friendship with Diblaim flourished and often I journeyed with him to visit. I was strangely drawn to Gomer. Diblaim and my father talked incessantly. Then one day my father astounded me with the proposal, "Hosea, it is my desire that you should marry Gomer." I did not question that I loved Gomer. But something about her troubled me. As most young women of her time, she had a love for expensive clothing, jewelry and cosmetics. That I accepted as part of her womanhood. But she seemed somehow to be experienced beyond her years in the ways of the world.

Yet I loved her. It was my father's will that I should marry her. I knew that my burning love for Jehovah would win her from any wanton ways. God confirmed to me that indeed Gomer was His choice as well.

I wooed her with the passion of a prophet. God had given me the gift of poetry and I flooded Gomer with words of love.

She responded to my love. We stood together beneath the flower-strewn canopy of the Hebrew marriage altar and pledged eternal love to God and each other. We listened together to the reading of God's laws of marriage. We heard the reminder that our marriage was a symbol of the marriage between Jehovah and Israel, His wife.

I took Gomer to my home. We read together the Song of Songs which is Solomon's. We ate the sweet fruit of its garden of love. She was as refreshing to me as the first fig of the season. Gomer seemed content in the love of God and Hosea. I looked forward to the future with hope.

Shortly after the anniversary of our first year of marriage, Gomer presented me with a son. I sought God's face and learned that his name was to be Jezreel--a name that would constantly remind Israel that God's judgment was surely coming. It was a stark reminder to me of the times in which we lived.

With the birth of Jezreel, Gomer seemed to change. She became distant and a sensual look flashed in her eye. I thought it was a reaction to the responsibility of caring for our son. Those were busy days. The message of God inflamed me and I cried out throughout the land.

Gomer was soon with child again. This time a daughter was born. I learned from God that she was to be named Lo-Ruhamah. It was a strange name, and it troubled me deeply for it meant, "No Mercy." For God said, "I will no longer show my mercy to the nation of Israel, that I should forgive her."

Gomer began to drift from me after that. Often she would leave after putting the children to bed and not return until dawn. She grew worn, haggard, and rebellious. I sought every way possible to restore her to me, but to no avail. About eighteen months later a third child was born, a boy. God told me to call him Lo-Ammi--meaning, "Not My People." God said to Israel, "You are not my people, and I am not your God." In my heart a thorn was driven. I knew that he was not my son and that his sister was not the fruit of my love. Those were days of deep despair. I could not sing the songs of David. My heart broke within me.

After Lo-Ammi was weaned, Gomer drifted beyond my reach--and did not return. I became both father and mother to the three children.

I felt a blight upon my soul. My ministry seemed paralyzed by the waywardness of my wife. My prayers seemed to sink downward. But then Jehovah stirred me. I came to know that God was going to use my experience as an illustration of His love for Israel.

Love flamed again for Gomer and I knew that I could not give her up. I sought her throughout Samaria. I found her in the ramshackle house of a lustful, dissolute Israelite who lacked the means to support her. I begged her to return. She spurned all my pleadings. Heavy-hearted, I returned to the children and mourned and prayed. My mind warmed to a

plan. I went to the market, bought food and clothes for Gomer. I bought the jewelry and cosmetics she loved so dearly. Then I sought her lover in private. He was suspicious, thinking that I had come to do him harm. When I told him my plan, a sly smile crept over his face. If I could not take Gomer home, my love would not let men see her wanting. I would provide all her needs and she could think that they came from him. We struck hands on the bargain. He struggled home under his load of provisions. I followed in the shadows.

She met him with joy and showered him with love. She told him to wait outside the house while she replaced her dirty, worn apparel with the new. After what seemed hours, she reappeared dressed in radiant splendor, like the Gomer I saw that first day at the home of her father. Her lover approached to embrace her, but she held him off. I heard her say, "No, surely the clothes and food and cosmetics are not from your hand but from the hand of Baal who gives all such things. I am resolved to express my gratitude to Baal by serving as a priestess at the high place.

It was as if I were suddenly encased in stone. I could not move. I saw her walk away. She seemed like the rebellious heifer I had seen as a youth in my father's herd. She could not be helped but would go astray. The more I tried to restore her the further she went from me. Feeble with inner pain, I stumbled home to sleepless nights and days of confusion and grief.

Gomer gave herself with reckless abandonment to the requirements of her role of priestess of Baal. She eagerly prostituted her body to the wanton will of the worshipers of that sordid deity.

My ministry became a pilgrimage of pain. I became an object of derision. It seemed that the penalty for the sin of Gomer--and of all my people--had settled upon me.

I fell back upon Jehovah. My father and mother helped in the care and instruction of the three children. They responded in love and obedience. They became the Balm of Gilead for my wounded heart. The years passed as I sounded the burden of God throughout the land. Daily I prayed for Gomer and as I prayed, love sang in my soul.

She was my nightly dream and so real that upon waking I often felt as if she had just left me again.

The years flowed on but the priests of Baal held her in their deadly clutches.

It was just over a year ago that it happened. The blush of spring was beginning to touch our land. In the midst of the my morning hour of meditation, God seemed to move

me to go among the people of Samaria. I was stirred with a sense of deep anticipation. I wandered through the streets.

Soon I was standing in the slave market. It was a place I loathed. Then I saw a priest of Baal lead a woman to the slave block. My heart stood still. It was Gomer. A terrible sight she was, to be sure, but it was Gomer. Stark naked she stood on the block. But no man stared in lust. She was broken, haggard, and thin as a wisp of smoke. Her ribs stood out beneath the skin. Her hair was matted and touched with streaks of gray, and in her eye was the flash of madness. I wept.

Then softly the voice of God's love whispered to my heart. I paused, confused. The bidding had reached thirteen shekels of silver before I fully understood God's purpose. I bid fifteen shekels of silver. There was a pause. A voice on the edge of the crowd said, "fifteen shekels and a homer of barley."

"Fifteen shekels and a homer and half of barley," I cried. The bidding was done.

As I mounted the slave block, a murmur surged through the crowd. They knew me and they knew Gomer. They leaned forward in anticipation. Surely I would strike her dead on the spot for her waywardness. But my heart flowed with love.

I stood in front of Gomer, and cried out to the people: "God says to you, 'Unless Israel removes her adulteries from her, I will strip her as naked as the day she was born. I will make her like a desert, and leave her like a parched land to die of thirst.'"

I cried to a merchant at a nearby booth, "Bring that white robe on the end of the rack."

I paid him the price he asked. Then I tenderly drew the robe around Gomer's emaciated body and said to her, "Gomer, you are mine by the natural right of a husband. Now you are also mine because I have bought you for a price. You will no longer wander from me or play the harlot. You must be confined for a time and then I will restore you to the full joys of womanhood."

She sighed and fainted, falling into my arms. I held her and spoke to the people, "Israel will remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or ephod. Afterwards Israel will return and seek the Lord her God and David her king. She will come trembling to the Lord and to His benefits in the last days. And where it was said of Israel, 'Lo-Ruhamah--you have no mercy,' it will be said 'Ruhamah--you have mercy.' For the love of God will not give you up, but pursue you throughout your days. And where Israel was

called 'Lo-Ammi--you are not My people,' it will be said, 'Ammi--you are the people of the living God,' for I will forgive you and restore you."

I returned home with my frail burden. I nursed Gomer back to health. Daily I read her the writings of God. I taught her to sing the penitential song of David and then together we sang the songs of David's joyful praise to God. In the midst of song I restored her to God, to our home, and to our children.

Do you not see how beautiful she is? I have loved her always, even in the depth of her waywardness because my God loves her. Gomer responded to God's love and to mine. She does not call me "my master," but "my husband." And the name of Baal has never again been on her lips.

Now my people listen to my message with new responsiveness, for I am a prophet that has been thrilled with great truth. I have come to know in the depth of my being how desperately God loves sinners. How deliberately He seeks them! How devotedly He woos them to Himself!